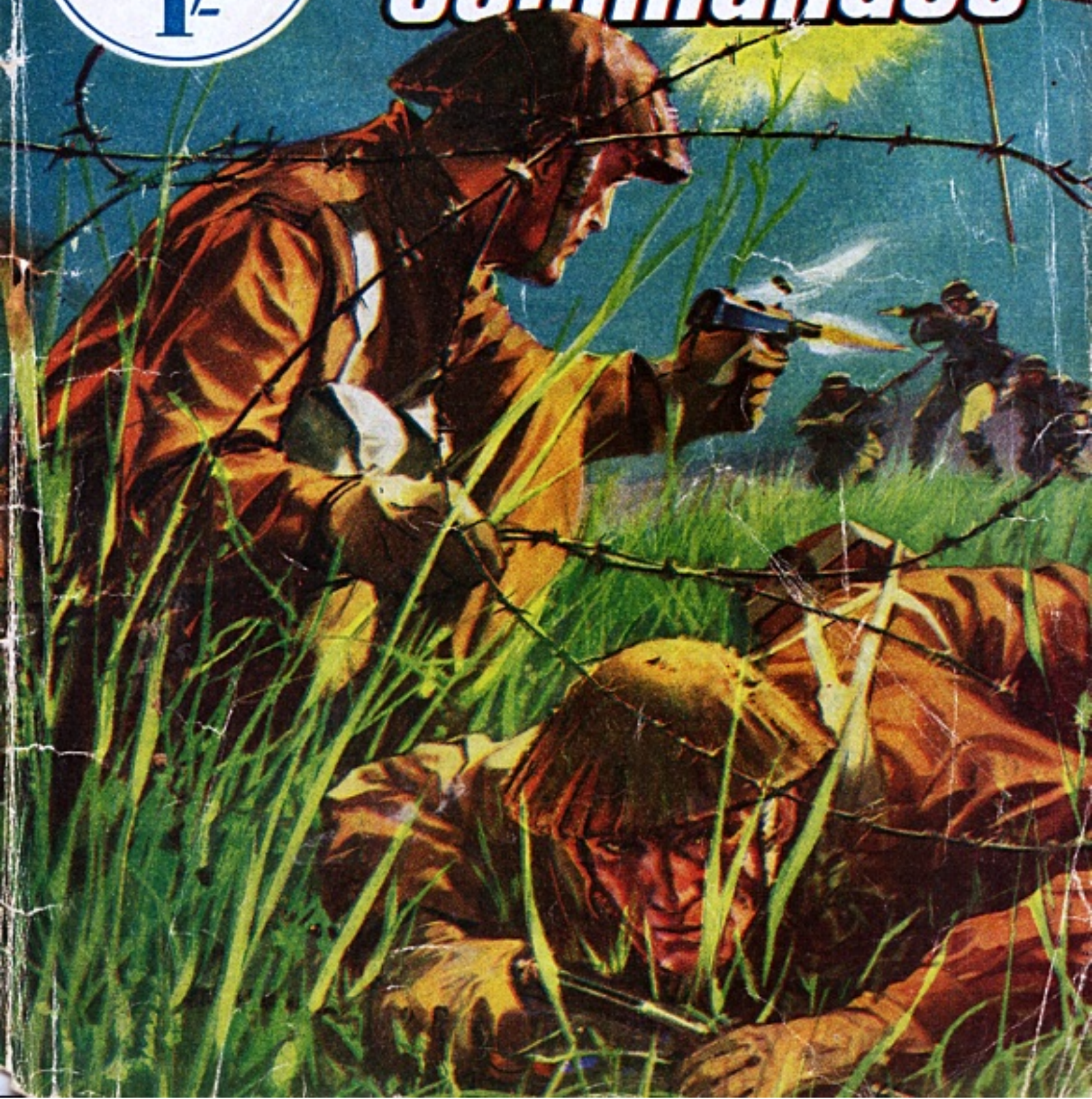




Cottonwool Commandos



LOOK!

**THESE
TWO
TERRIFIC
ISSUES
NOW
ON
SALE**



The NELSON TOUCH



ESCORT



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Cottonwool Commandos

APRIL, 1944 -- A BRITISH DIVISION, PINNED DOWN ON THE BEACHES AT ANZIO IN NORTHERN ITALY, HAMMERED DESPERATELY AT THE IMPREGNABLE STEEL RING OF THE GERMAN DEFENCES. FOR WEEKS THE BATTLE POUNDED ON ...



Chapter 1. *Front Line*

FOR THE LAST FOUR HOURS, SERGEANT JACK TANNER AND "A" PLATOON OF THE 4TH PETTSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY HAD BEEN STUCK IN A SHALLOW, SANDY TRENCH... HELD THERE BY THE DEVASTATING ACCURACY OF A GERMAN MACHINE-GUN CREW...



AT THAT VERY MOMENT, THE COMPANY COMMANDER SCRAMBLED INTO THE TRENCH... DODGING BY A SPLIT SECOND A HOT STREAM OF LEAD FROM THE ENEMY MACHINE-GUNNER!



BREATHLESSLY, THE OFFICER EXPLAINED HIS MISSION ...

THAT
MACHINE-GUN
MUST BE PUT
OUT OF ACTION,
SERGEANT. I WANT
VOLUNTEERS TO
TACKLE IT.

WE WERE JUST
SAYING THE SAME
THING, SIR ... 'A'
PLATOON WOULD
LIKE TO HAVE A
GO!

... BUT 'DODGER' WILSON, 'A' PLATOON'S SOLE SCRIMSHANKER,
WAS NOT TOO KEEN ON THE IDEA!

THERE GOES
TANNER ...
VOLUNTEERING ALL
OF US FOR SUICIDE!
JUST BECAUSE HIS
OLD MAN RUNS A
BATTLE-TRAINING
SCHOOL, HE RECKONS
HE'S GOT TO ACT
TOUGH ALL THE
TIME!

TERSELY, SERGEANT TANNER ISSUED HIS ORDERS ...

WE'LL DIVIDE THE PLATOON. WHILE ONE PARTY IS ON THE MOVE, THE OTHER WILL KEEP UP INTENSE COVERING FIRE ON THE JERRY POSITION ...



KEEP WELL SPREAD OUT-- AND KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN!

WHILE CHALKY WHITE'S SECTION DASHED FOR THE COVER OF SOME NEARBY ROCKS, JACK TANNER AND HIS MEN LAID DOWN A HAILSTORM OF FIRE ON THE GERMAN POSITION ...

KEEP IT GOING, BOYS!



THEN, FROM THE SCANTY COVER OF THE BOULDERS, CHALKY'S SECTION BLASTED THE MACHINE-GUN SITE WHILE SERGEANT TANNER AND HIS MEN RACED FORWARD ...

SPREAD OUT,
WILSON! YOU'RE
TOO CLOSE
TO ME!



... BUT PANIC HAD DODGER WILSON IN ITS ICY GRIP. DEAF TO EVERYTHING BUT THE THUD AND WHINE OF BULLETS PUNCHING THE SAND AROUND HIM, HE JUST KEPT RUNNING ...



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SERGEANT TANNER'S SECTION REACHED THE COVER THEY HAD AIMED FOR, AND DROPPED DOWN. BUT DODGER RAN ON -- TERRIFIED AND UNHEEDING ...



FOR A FEW SECONDS, DODGER SEEMED TO BEAR A CHARMED LIFE ... THEN HE STUMBLED AND BEGAN TO FALL AS THE ENEMY RANGED ON TO HIM.



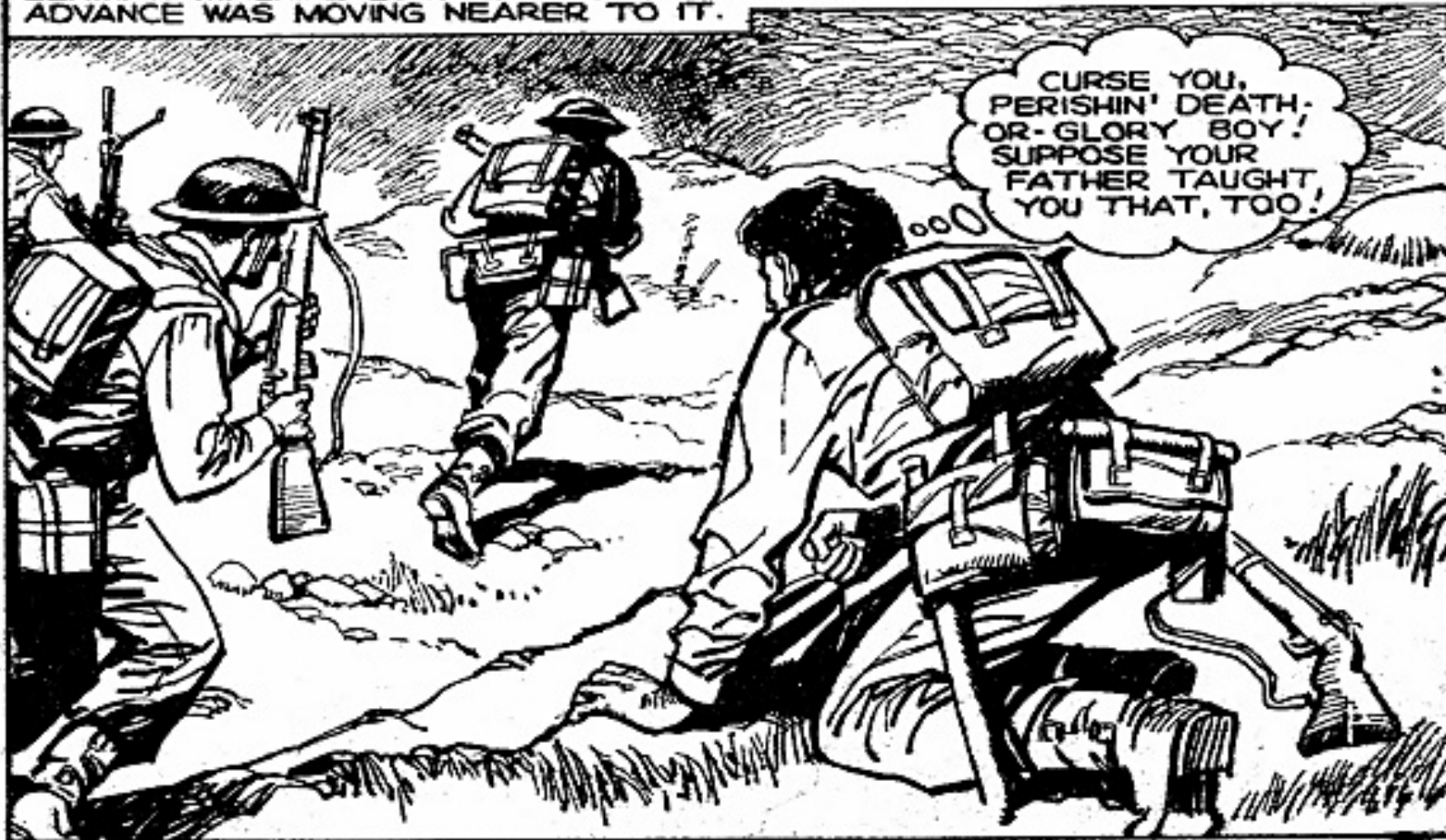
ON THE NEXT LEG OF THEIR HAZARDOUS ADVANCE, SERGEANT TANNER DASHED PAST THE STRICKEN DODGER WHO GASPED AN AGONISED APPEAL FOR HELP...

HELP ME,
SARGE! I THINK
MY LEG'S
BROKEN.



BUT SERGEANT TANNER HAD EYES ONLY FOR HIS OBJECTIVE -- THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUN. EACH LEG OF 'A' PLATOON'S TWO-PRONGED ADVANCE WAS MOVING NEARER TO IT.

CURSE YOU,
PERISHIN' DEATH-
OR-GLORY BOY!
SUPPOSE YOUR
FATHER TAUGHT
YOU THAT, TOO!



Cottonwool Commandos

TWO MORE LEGS OF THIS PERIL-FRAUGHT ATTACK AND SERGEANT TANNER WAS WITHIN A HUNDRED YARDS OF THE ENEMY GUNS... SUDDENLY, THE PERFECT TIMING OF THE TWO SECTIONS FALTERED. BOTH PARTIES WERE ON THEIR FEET TOGETHER.



...THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUN CREW SEIZED THEIR OPPORTUNITY.

THE GUN'S HAMMERING BURST SCYTHED DOWN THE THREE REMAINING MEN OF SERGEANT TANNER'S SECTION...



CHALKY WHITE'S SECTION WAS TOO LATE TO STOP THE WITHERING BLAST OF GERMAN FIRE, BUT AS SERGEANT TANNER PRESSED FORWARD, THEY KEPT UP A NON-STOP FUSILLADE ON THE MACHINE-GUN POST...



JACK TANNER, HIS HEART POUNDING, LOBBED TWO GRENADES WITH DEADLY ACCURACY RIGHT INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE GERMAN GUN POSITION...



WITH A SHATTERING ROAR, THE MACHINE-GUN POST ERUPTED IN A GOUT OF SMOKE AND FLAME...



THE SILENCING OF THE SPANDAU WAS THE SIGNAL FOR EVERY GERMAN WEAPON IN THE AREA TO OPEN UP ON THE SLOPES BELOW. IT WAS GOING TO BE TRICKY GETTING BACK ...

LET IT QUIETEN DOWN A BIT. THEN WE'LL MAKE A DASH FOR IT. I'LL GIVE DODGER A HAND AS WE PASS HIM ...



BUT DODGER WILSON WAS NOT WAITING FOR THEM. ALTHOUGH HE WAS SUFFERING AGONY AT EVERY MOVEMENT, HE WAS STILL INCHING HIS WAY BACK TOWARDS THE BRITISH LINES ...



IT'LL TAKE ... HOURS ... TO GET BACK ... AT THIS RATE!

SUDDENLY, HE WAS HELPED ON TO HIS FEET
AND STRONG ARMS HELD HIM UP ...

HERE, HANG ON
TO ME, DODGER!
WE'LL SOON HAVE
YOU BACK!

SARGE!



AS COOLLY AS IF HE WAS WALKING ACROSS BRIGHTON BEACH,
SERGEANT TANNER MOVED ACROSS THE SAND TO THE FIRST-AID
POST, HALF-CARRYING THE WOUNDED MAN ...

HERE WE ARE,
DODGER! THEY'LL
SOON FIX YOU UP!

THANKS, SARGE.
YOU SAVED MY
LIFE... I... I DON'T
KNOW HOW I CAN
EVER REPAY...



JUST DON'T GET CAUGHT AGAIN THE SAME WAY, THAT'S ALL! REMEMBER THE TWO GOLDEN RULES-- DO AS YOU'RE ORDERED... AND GET YOUR HEAD DOWN FAST!

OKAY, SARGE, BUT I HAVEN'T NOTICED YOU FOLLOWING YOUR OWN ADVICE... IF YOU HAD, I MIGHT NOT BE HERE NOW.



LEAVING DODGER IN THE SAFE HANDS OF THE MEDICS, SERGEANT TANNER SET OFF TO RETURN TO THE REMNANTS OF "A" PLATOON.

I TAKE BACK ALL I SAID ABOUT HIM. HE MAY BE TOUGH, BUT HIS HEART'S IN THE RIGHT PLACE!



FREED FROM THE MENACE OF THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUN, THE 4TH PETTSHIRES ADVANCED A FEW HUNDRED YARDS AND DUG IN AGAIN. SETTLED IN A NEW FOX-HOLE, SERGEANT TANNER BEGAN TO WRITE HOME...



Dear Dad.
It's pretty hot here. We'll probably have a party on my birthday, but not the kind you and I always used to have...

"DEAR DAD, IT'S PRETTY HOT HERE. WE'LL PROBABLY HAVE A PARTY ON MY BIRTHDAY, BUT NOT THE KIND YOU AND I ALWAYS USED TO HAVE..."

Chapter 2. *Battle School*

WHILE THE 4TH PETTSHIRES GRAPPLED WITH THE GERMANS AT ANZIO, SERGEANT TANNER'S FATHER, R.S.M. "TOUGH" TANNER, WAS PUTTING YET ANOTHER BATTALION THROUGH THE FINAL STAGES OF THE BATTLE-TRAINING COURSE AT WINTLESHAM IN NORFOLK...



"TOUGH" TANNER'S STENTORIAN VOICE SHOOK THE BARRACK HUTS WITH ITS VIBRATIONS! THE MEN FELL OUT OF THEIR BEDS, EARS PRICKED FOR THE NEXT ANNOUNCEMENT...



Cottonwool Commandos

DAWN FOUND THE HARASSED BATTALION MARCHING BREAKFASTLESS ALONG THE LONG NORFOLK ROADS... WITH R.S.M. TANNER RELENTLESSLY ON THEIR TAIL.

AIR ALERT! DON'T LOOK UP! THAT'S THE FINEST WAY OF SHOWING THE PILOT THERE ARE TROOPS DOWN BELOW. KEEP YOUR FACES DOWN, SPREAD OUT AND KEEP UNDER COVER...



THAT SET THE PATTERN FOR THE REST OF THAT LONG AND WEARYING DAY. AT EVERY TURN, TOUGH TANNER STOOD READY TO CREATE A HAZARD OR A DIFFICULTY... TO EXHORT AND BROW-BEAT AND BELLOW...



YOU DOZY BUNCH OF COTTONWOOL COMMANDOS! YOU'RE NEARLY THROUGH... TWO MILES BACK TO THE DEPOT, A QUICK RUN ROUND THE ASSAULT COURSE AND YOU CAN DISMISS!

OH!
NO!

"COTTONWOOL COMMANDOS!" A LEGION OF RAW RECRUITS HAD EARNED THAT DERISIVE NICKNAME FROM TOUGH TANNER AS THEY SLOGGED AND SWEATED UNDER HIS EAGLE EYE.

IT WAS ONLY THE TERRIFYING ROAR OF TOUGH TANNER'S VOICE THAT KEPT HALF THE BATTALION ON ITS FEET ROUND THE EXHAUSTING ASSAULT COURSE ...

**PUT SOME
PEP INTO IT!
YOU THERE! STICK
THAT BAYONET IN
AS IF YOUR LIFE
DEPENDS ON IT...
IT MAY SOME
DAY!**



AT LAST, THE ENDLESS DAY WAS OVER...THE COURSE WAS FINISHED, AND THE DAZED AND UTTERLY EXHAUSTED BATTALION STUMBLERD THROUGH THE GATES OF THE BARRACKS.

YOU KNOW, MISTER TANNER--
I THINK YOU GET TOUGHER
STILL AS THE YEARS GO
BY....

DO
I, SIR?



AS THEY STROLLED BACK TO THE DEPOT OFFICE, R.S.M. TANNER PUT HIS POINT OF VIEW TO THE C.O....

I THINK PERHAPS IT IS THE MEMORIES I HAVE OF THE FIRST WAR, SIR. THOUSANDS OF YOUNG CHAPS DIED BECAUSE THEY HAD NO TRAINING IN SELF-PRESERVATION, AS YOU MIGHT SAY.



AS I SEE IT, MY JOB IS TO TAKE THE PLACE OF THE ENEMY FOR THEM. THAT, PLUS WHAT WE TEACH THEM, WILL HELP THEM WHEN IT COMES TO THE REAL THING...

I SEE YOUR POINT, MISTER TANNER. YOU'VE A BOY OF YOUR OWN IN THE ARMY NOW, HAVEN'T YOU?



AT THE MENTION OF HIS SON, THE OLD
WARRIOR'S STERN FEATURES SOFTENED...

HE'S A
SERGEANT IN THE
PETTSHIRE LIGHT--
IN ITALY AT THE
MOMENT. THAT'S
HIS BIRTHDAY
MARKED ON THE
CALENDAR...



THIS WILL BE THE FIRST TIME
WE HAVEN'T BEEN TOGETHER ON
HIS BIRTHDAY. WE'VE ALWAYS
MANAGED IT BEFORE, EVEN
DURING THE WAR...


IS THAT SO?
WHAT ABOUT
YOUR WIFE?



FOR SOME REASON, THE OLD
WARHORSE WAS UNUSUALLY
COMMUNICATIVE THAT NIGHT.

SHE DIED WHEN
JACK WAS BORN,
SIR. I'VE HAD TO BE
FATHER AND MOTHER
TO HIM -- THAT MIGHT
MAKE SOME OF THE
BOYS OUT THERE
LAUGH -- BUT
WE'VE ALWAYS
GOT ALONG
FINE, THE LAD
AND ME.






SO THIS YEAR
WILL BE THE FIRST
TIME YOU HAVEN'T
SPENT HIS BIRTHDAY
TOGETHER, EH?

YES, SIR.
BUT THERE WE
ARE... 'C'EST LA
GUERRE'... AS WE
USED TO SAY IN
THE OTHER
WAR...

PERHAPS
I CAN DO
SOMETHING
ABOUT THAT.

ALREADY A PLAN WAS TAKING SHAPE IN THE COLONEL'S MIND...



WELL, MISTER TANNER,
HERE'S SOME NEWS
FOR YOU! **YOU** ARE
GOING ON LEAVE
FROM TOMORROW!

LEAVE, SIR?
BUT...WHAT ABOUT
THE NEW BATTALION
THAT'S DUE IN?

THE COLONEL'S VOICE WAS STERN AND OFFICIAL ...
BUT THERE WAS A TWINKLE IN HIS EYE ...

IN MY OPINION,
MISTER TANNER, YOU NEED
LEAVE. YOU'VE BEEN
WORKING TOO HARD.
NOW, IF YOU HAVE NO
OBJECTION, I SHOULD
LIKE TO USE YOUR
TELEPHONE FOR A
PRIVATE MATTER ...

AS THE BEWILDERED R.S.M. WALKED OUT OF THE OFFICE, THE C.O. PUT
THROUGH A CALL TO GROUP-CAPTAIN HALESOWEN AT THE NEARBY
AIRFIELD ... THEY WERE OLD SCHOOL CHUMS ...

THAT YOU,
HALESOWEN?
YOU ONCE TOLD
ME ABOUT A
COURIER SERVICE
YOUR MOSQUITOES
FLY TO ITALY
EVERY DAY. NOW,
LISTEN ...

... AT THE OTHER END OF THE LINE, GROUP-CAPTAIN HALESOWEN WAS AGHAST AT THE REQUEST MADE BY THE C.O.

BUT IT'S STRICTLY AGAINST REGULATIONS, OLD BOY. YOU'LL HAVE ME IN HOT WATER... OH, VERY WELL, THEN. SEND THE CHAP ALONG. I'LL SEE HE'S FIXED UP.



THE C.O. MADE ONE OR TWO MORE CALLS TO OLD FRIENDS AND HIS PLAN WAS COMPLETE...

EVEN MISTER TANNER DOESN'T KNOW WHAT THE ARMY CAN DO WHEN IT TRIES! I'LL SEE THAT HE AND HIS LAD KEEP THAT BIRTHDAY DATE.



Chapter 3. *Text-Book War*

TWO DAYS LATER, IN THE MISTY LIGHT OF EARLY DAWN, A MOSQUITO CIRCLED THE LANDING STRIP OF AN AIRFIELD IN ITALY...

HOLD TIGHT, MISTER TANNER. WE'RE JUST TOUCHING DOWN.

RIGHT!

TO THE SURPRISE OF THE GROUND CREWS, WHEN THE MOSQUITO BUMPED TO A HALT, OUT STEPPED AN ARMY R.S.M. ... COMPLETE WITH SWAGGER STICK!

COR! WE MUST BE IN DEAD TROUBLE IF THEY NEED OLD BOYS LIKE HIM OUT HERE!



... AFTER A BRIEF WORD OF THANKS TO THE PILOT, R.S.M. TOUGH TANNER SWUNG THROUGH THE GATES OF THE AIRFIELD ON THE SECOND PART OF HIS JOURNEY ...

BEST
OF LUCK,
MISTER TANNER!

HE'S A PROPER
OLD MARTINET... BUT
YOU CAN'T HELP
LIKING HIM.



FOR SEVERAL HOURS, MR. TANNER'S ERECT FIGURE WAS THE ONLY MOVING THING TO BE SEEN IN THE BARE AND DESOLATE COUNTRYSIDE ...



THEN, AS HE BREASTED A SLIGHT SLOPE, HE SAW THE SMALL FIGURE OF A SOLDIER WRESTLING WITH THE WHEEL OF A BROKEN-DOWN TRUCK...



BUT AS HE REACHED WITHIN SHOUTING DISTANCE OF THE TRUCK, HIS SHARP EARS PICKED UP THE DRONE OF AN AIRCRAFT ENGINE...



R.S.M. TANNER WAS RIGHT. THE LONE RAIDER SWUNG LAZILY ROUND TOWARDS THE ROAD. THE STENTORIAN ROAR OF TOUGH'S VOICE BURST LIKE A THUNDER-CLAP ON THE EARS OF THE UNHEEDING FIGURE BENT OVER THE WHEEL ...



HEY! YOU THERE
WITH THE TRUCK...
AIR ALERT!
MAN THAT
GUN!

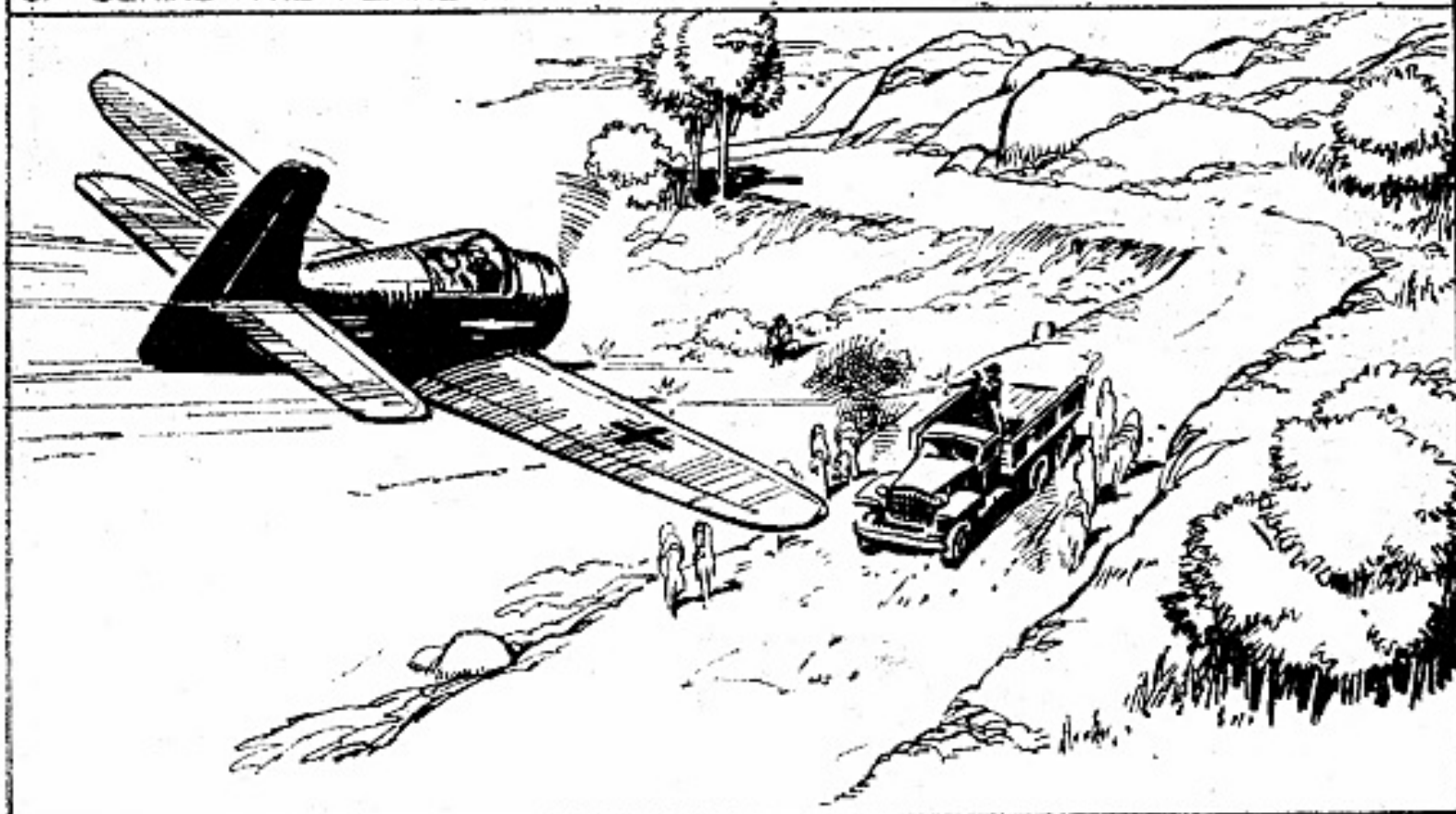
AS THE GERMAN PLANE DIVED IN TO THE ATTACK, THE SOLDIER SCRAMBLED FOR THE BREN GUN MOUNTED IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK ... AND TOUGH TANNER URGED HIM ON ...



HURRY, MAN!
AND DON'T
FORGET TO AIM
CORRECTLY!

I KNOW THAT
VOICE! IT'S OLD
TOUGH TANNER!
WHAT'S HE
DOING OUT
HERE?

THE NEXT SECOND, THE ROAD WAS CHURNED UP BY STREAMS OF BULLETS FROM THE FW.190'S TWENTY MILLIMETRE GUNS. CONTEMPTUOUSLY, THE PILOT IGNORED THE SINGLE STREAM OF TRACER THAT STREAKED UP BEHIND THE PLANE ...



AS THE PLANE SLICED THE SKY OVER THE TRUCK, TOUGH TANNER HAD A FEW ACID WORDS FOR THE LUCKLESS PRIVATE ...



SWIFTLY, THE PLANE SWUNG IN A WIDE SWEEP ACROSS THE SKY, MANOEUVRING FOR A SECOND ATTACK. TOUGH KEPT UP HIS STREAM OF ADVICE TO THE SCARED GUNNER...

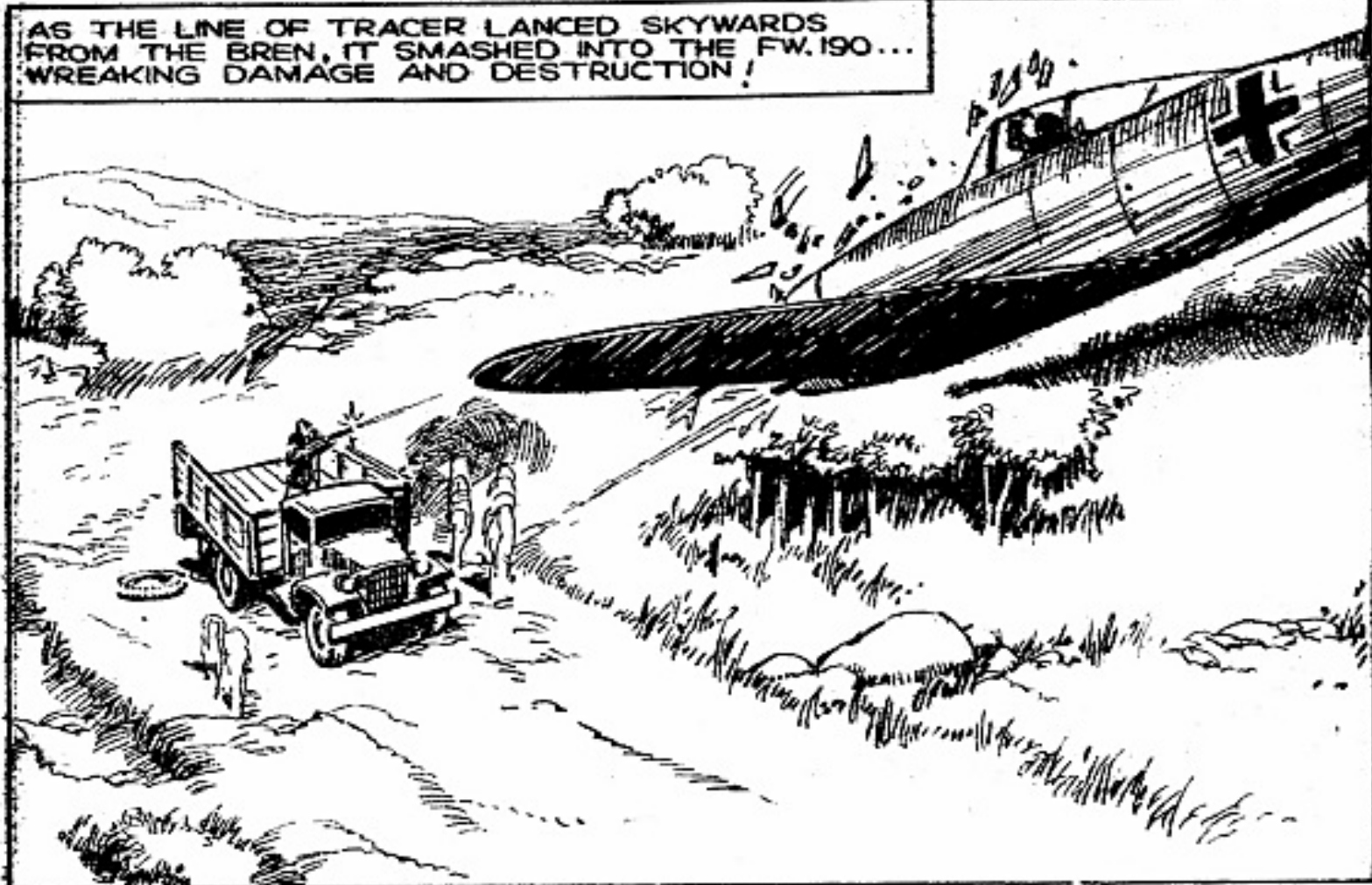
THIS TIME, AIM OFF IN FRONT... AND HOLD YOUR FIRE UNTIL I GIVE THE ORDER! THAT CLEAR?

WISH THERE WAS TIME FOR US TO CHANGE PLACES. OLD TOUGH MAKES IT SOUND EASY.

THE FW. 190 SWOOPED IN FOR ITS SECOND ATTACK, GUNS BLAZING IN BITTER FURY...

STEADY, MAN... STEADY... KEEP WELL IN FRONT, BUT HOLD IT... NOW... FIRE!

AS THE LINE OF TRACER LANCED SKYWARDS FROM THE BREN, IT SMASHED INTO THE FW.190...
WREAKING DAMAGE AND DESTRUCTION!



TRAILING A PLUME OF BLACK SMOKE, THE FW.190 PLUNGED TO EARTH...

GOT IT!

WELL
DONE, BOY...
WELL DONE!



TOUGH TANNER FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO RESTRAIN A GRIN AT THE EXCITED ANTICS OF THE JUBILANT SOLDIER ...

WHAT ABOUT THAT, SIR? GLAD YOU WERE A WITNESS, MISTER TANNER, THEY MIGHT THINK I'M SHOOTING A LINE WHEN I REPORT THIS!



HOW DO YOU KNOW MY NAME, EH?

I'VE BEEN THROUGH YOUR BATTLE SCHOOL, SIR. PRIVATE BLAKE... BUT I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'D REMEMBER ME...





TRUE TO FORM, THE OLD WAR-HORSE POINTED OUT TO THE YOUNG SOLDIER THE ERROR OF HIS WAYS ...

IF YOU HAD BEEN A
STAR PUPIL YOU WOULD
HAVE AIMED CORRECTLY
AT THAT PLANE FIRST
TIME ... **AND** YOU WOULD
HAVE PULLED UP UNDER
THAT CLUMP OF TREES,
NOT STUCK YOURSELF
OUT IN THE OPEN !

DEFINITELY
STILL THE SAME OLD
TOUGH TANNER !



SECRETLY AMUSED, PRIVATE BLAKE COULD NOT CONCEAL HIS CURIOSITY AT TOUGH'S REASON FOR BEING IN ITALY ...

KEEP IT IN MIND, BLAKE ... NEXT TIME, YOU MAY NOT GET ANOTHER CHANCE!



YES, SIR. BY THE WAY, YOU'RE A LONG WAY FROM HOME -- ARE THEY OPENING A BATTLE SCHOOL IN ITALY?

VERY AMUSING, BLAKE. I'M TRYING TO FIND THE FOURTH PETTSHIRE S. ANY IDEA WHERE THEY ARE?



BLAKE WELCOMED THE CHANCE TO DO SOMETHING FOR THE OLD SOLDIER HE RESPECTED SO MUCH.

THERE'S A PETTSHIRE MOB ABOUT TEN MILES FROM HERE. I'M GOING THAT WAY, SIR. I COULD DROP YOU OFF IF YOU LIKE!

GOOD! I'D BE GLAD OF A LIFT, BLAKE.



A FEW MINUTES LATER, THE REPAIRED TRUCK WAS BOUNCING ALONG THE ROAD ...

I CAN DROP YOU WITHIN A COUPLE OF MILES OF THE UNIT, SIR. SORRY I CAN'T TAKE YOU ALL THE WAY, BUT I'M LATE REPORTING NOW.

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, BLAKE. DROP ME WHERE YOU LIKE.

HARDLY HAD THE R.S.M. STEPPED DOWN FROM THE TRUCK THAN THE DULL DRONE OF ENGINES HERALDED THE APPROACH OF A COLUMN OF VEHICLES ...

GOODBYE, MISTER TANNER, SIR ... AND GOOD LUCK!

THANK YOU, BLAKE ... AND THE SAME TO YOU!

AS THE COLUMN THUNDERED PAST, TOUGH WAS STARTLED BY THE SCREAM OF TYRES AS A FIFTEEN-HUNDRED-WEIGHT LORRY SKIDDED TO A HALT BESIDE HIM ...



AS THEY MOVED ON, THE YOUNG LIEUTENANT CONFIRMED THE OLD WAR-HORSE'S GUESS.

I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT YOU AND YOUR BATTLE SCHOOL, MISTER TANNER! WE'RE GOING INTO ACTION, SOON -- HOPE I REMEMBER EVERYTHING I LEARNED FROM YOU...

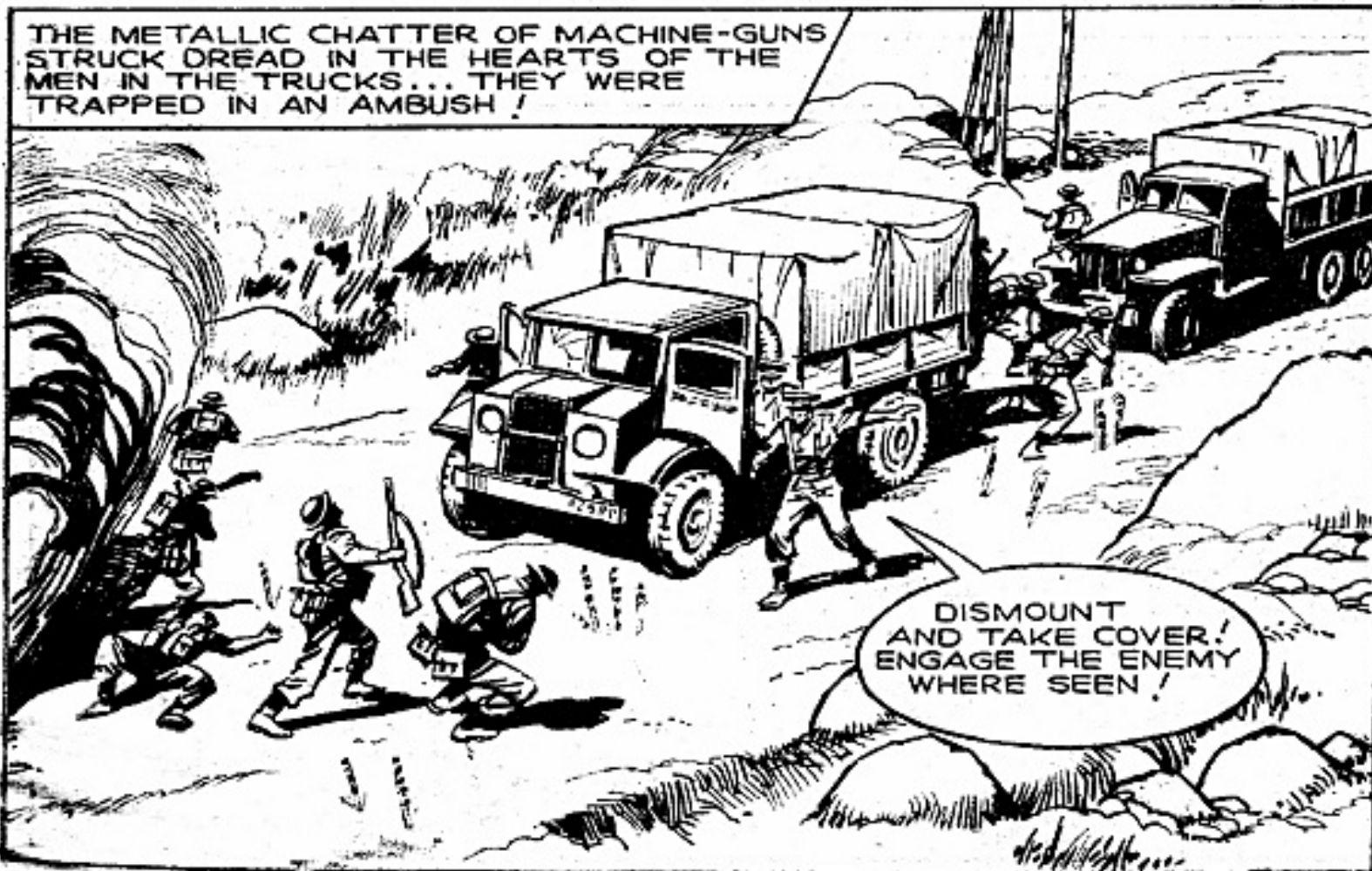
I HOPE SO, TOO, SIR.



BUT TOUGH TANNER'S THOUGHTS WERE VIOLENTLY INTERRUPTED. THE LEADING TRUCK IN THE COLUMN BOUNCED VICIOUSLY IN A PALL OF SMOKE AND FLAME. THE CRASH JOLTED TOUGH'S TEETH...



THE METALLIC CHATTER OF MACHINE-GUNS STRUCK DREAD IN THE HEARTS OF THE MEN IN THE TRUCKS... THEY WERE TRAPPED IN AN AMBUSH!



THE TROOPS SHOT OUT OF THE TRUCKS
AND MADE A PANICKY DASH FOR SAFETY...

AAARGH!



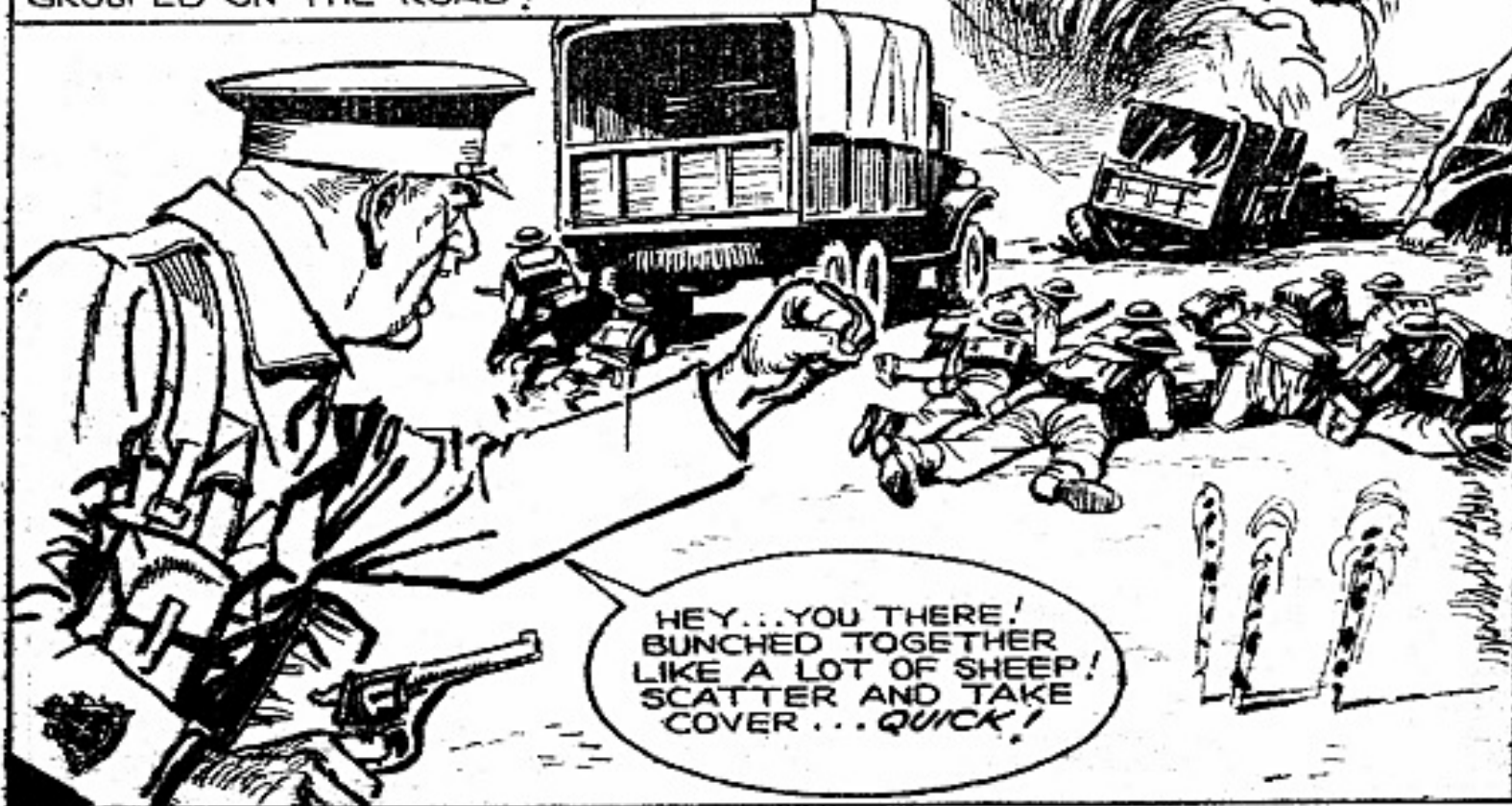
REVOLVER DRAWN WITH THE SPEED OF A WESTERN GUNSLINGER,
TOUGH TANNER LEAPED TO THE ROAD AND LOOKED ROUND FOR A
TARGET...

I'VE GOT TO HAND
IT TO THESE JERRIES...
THEY KNOW THEIR
JOB--I CAN'T SPOT
ONE OF THEM!

UURGH!



ALTHOUGH THE R.S.M. COULD SEE NO GERMANS, HIS EYE LIGHTED ON SOMETHING THAT SET ALL HIS PROFESSIONAL INSTINCTS ABLAZE ... A SQUAD OF RAW YOUNGSTERS GROUPED ON THE ROAD!



HEY...YOU THERE!
BUNCHED TOGETHER
LIKE A LOT OF SHEEP!
SCATTER AND TAKE
COVER...QUICK!

THIS IS AN
AMBUSH...NOT
A SUNDAY
TEA PARTY!



SPURRED BY THE GOAD OF TOUGH'S ROUGH TONGUE,
THE GROUP SPLIT UP AND DIVED FOR COVER...

WHAT A
VOICE! DEAFENS
YOU, DOESN'T
IT?

THAT'S TOUGH
TANNER-- BRITAIN'S
SECRET WEAPON!



THE NEXT SECOND, A GRENADE HIT THE SPOT WHERE THE ROOKIES
HAD BEEN STANDING, CRUNCHING HARMLESSLY INTO THE ROAD ~~
THANKS TO THE BURLY R.S.M.



FOR TEN MINUTES THE BATTLE RAGED... GETTING HOTTER EACH MINUTE. THE TRAPPED INFANTRY WERE A SITTING TARGET FOR THE WITHERING FIRE OF THE WELL-HIDDEN GERMANS... EVEN TOUGH HAD TO GET HIS HEAD DOWN!

IF THIS GOES ON MUCH LONGER, WE'LL BE WIPED OUT!

YES, SIR... IT'S GRIM, ALL RIGHT!



THE TENSE AND INEXPERIENCED YOUNG OFFICER RACKED HIS BRAINS FOR A PLAN TO SAVE THE SITUATION... WITHOUT SUCCESS. TOUGH VENTURED A SUGGESTION...

MAY I SUGGEST WE FLUSH THE ENEMY OUT... A BAYONET CHARGE, SIR?

GOOD IDEA, MISTER TANNER. THANKS!



Cottonwool Commandos

BUT THE THIN VOICE OF THE OFFICER COULD NOT MAKE ITSELF HEARD ABOVE THE TREMENDOUS DIN OF THE BATTLE...



LEAPING TO HIS FEET, TOUGH ELECTRIFIED THE BEWILDERED SOLDIERS AT THE SHEER POWER OF HIS MIGHTY VOICE!



IMPELLED BY THE OLD WARRIOR'S VOICE AND PERSONALITY, THE RAW INFANTRY CHARGED LIKE WARRIORS... FANNING OUT FROM THE ROAD IN TWO VENGEFUL SWEEPS...



NOW THAT R.S.M. TANNER HAD PROMPTED HIM, THE YOUNG OFFICER PROVED HIMSELF A GOOD SOLDIER. COOLLY, HE PRESSED HOME THE ATTACK, LEADING HIS MEN FORWARD...



DAUNTED BY THE DETERMINED ASSAULT, THE GERMANS WERE ROUTED IN CONFUSION. THEY HURRIEDLY WITHDREW AS BEST THEY COULD...

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT! NOTHING LIKE A FULL-BLOODED CHARGE FOR WINKLING JERRY OUT!



AFTER THE ACTION, THE YOUNG OFFICER EXPRESSED HIS GRATEFUL THANKS TO THE WISE OLD WARRIOR...

THANK YOU, MISTER TANNER. I'M GLAD YOU WERE AROUND TO PUT ME RIGHT. THAT AMBUSH TOOK ME BY SURPRISE.

IF I MAY SAY SO, SIR, YOU DID VERY WELL. AND YOU'VE GOT SOME GOOD MEN THERE!



AFTER COLLECTING THEIR WOUNDED, THE BATTALION WAS SOON RUMBLING ALONG THE ROAD AGAIN... KEEPING A WATCHFUL EYE OPEN FOR MORE GERMANS ...

IT'S THE PETTSHIRES
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS
IT, MISTER TANNER? WE
CAN'T BE FAR FROM
THEIR LINES NOW.

GOOD!



SHORTLY AFTERWARDS, TOUGH TANNER BADE FAREWELL TO THE UNIT OUTSIDE THE HEADQUARTERS OF WHAT HE HOPED WAS THE FOURTH PETTSHIRES.

CHEERIO,
SIR. THANKS
FOR THE LIFT!

CRKEY! THAT'S
TOUGH TANNER...
THE BLOKE WHO RUNS
THE WINTLESHAM
BATTLE SCHOOL!



BUT, LOOKING ROUND AT THE FACES OF THE N.C.O.S., TOUGH TANNER REALISED THIS WAS NOT THE FOURTH BATTALION. IT WAS THE FIFTH BATTALION -- A UNIT THAT HAD PASSED THROUGH HIS SCHOOL LESS THAN SIX MONTHS BEFORE.

MISTER TANNER, SIR!
THIS IS A PLEASANT
SURPRISE! WHAT
CAN WE DO FOR
YOU?

...YES, THAT'S HIM ALL
RIGHT! VOICE LIKE A BULL,
TONGUE LIKE A WHIP-LASH --
AND A HEART OF PURE
GOLD... IF YOU GET
TO KNOW HIM!



THE R.S.M. SOON LEARNED THAT HIS TASK WAS GOING TO BE EVEN HARDER THAN HE HAD THOUGHT!


I'M AFRAID YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE
QUITE A JOB TO FIND YOUR SON,
MISTER TANNER. THE FOURTH BATTALION
IS ON THE BEACH-HEAD AT ANZIO --
EVEN THEIR SUPPLIES ARE
DROPPED BY PARACHUTE!

I SEE! WELL, I MIGHT
AS WELL MAKE MY WAY
BACK TO THE AIRFIELD,
I SUPPOSE. THERE'S NO
POINT IN TRYING TO
GET ANY FARTHER!




AFTER A REFRESHING CUP OF STEAMING TEA, THE DISPIRITED R.S.M. SET OFF ON THE LONG TREK BACK TO THE AIRFIELD...

SO CLOSE -- YET
I MIGHT JUST AS WELL
BE A THOUSAND MILES
AWAY. IT DOESN'T LOOK
AS IF I'LL BE SEEING
JACK THIS YEAR.



HARDLY HAD TOUGH TANNER GOT A MILE DOWN THE ROAD, BEFORE THE N.C.O.'S BACK AT THE FARMHOUSE SPOTTED THREE SQUAT, BLACK SHAPES ON THE HORIZON. IT LOOKED AS IF THE R.S.M. WAS HEADING FOR TROUBLE.



JERRY TANKS!
AND THEY'RE ON
THE ROAD OLD
TANNER'S TAKEN!

THE OLD BOY'LL BE
FOR IT IF WE DON'T
HURRY! TAKE TWO
PIAT TEAMS AND
TANGLE WITH THOSE
TANKS!

Cottonwool Commandos

TWO TRUCKS WITH MEN AND PIATS ABOARD ROARED DOWN THE ROAD AFTER TOUGH TANNER. THEY CAUGHT UP WITH HIM BEFORE THE GERMAN TANKS APPEARED ON THE SCENE.

GERMAN TANKS AHEAD, MISTER TANNER, SIR! WE'RE GOING TO CLEAR THE ROAD FOR YOU!

RIGHT!

AS THE TRUCKS SPED PAST HIM, TOUGH COULD NOT REFRAIN FROM GIVING SOME SOUND ADVICE...IN HIS USUAL STENTORIAN BELLOW!

DON'T FORGET--
TRACKS, TURRETS,
THEY'RE THE
SPOTS TO AIM
FOR!

BY THE TIME TOUGH HAD BREASTED THE RISE IN FRONT, THE ACTION WAS IN FULL SWING ... HE HAD A GRANDSTAND VIEW!



THREE TREMENDOUS CRASHES ROARED OUT ... AND THE THREE GERMAN TANKS WERE OUT OF ACTION! IT WAS A TEXT-BOOK PERFORMANCE ... TOUGH WAS DELIGHTED!



AS TOUGH RESUMED HIS LONELY MARCH TO THE AIRFIELD, HE FELT A WARM GLOW OF COMRADESHIP FOR HIS FORMER PUPILS. THEY HAD REMEMBERED THEIR LESSONS WELL!



Chapter 4. *Happy Returns!*

WEARY AND FOOTSORE AFTER HIS LONG WALK BACK TO THE AIRFIELD, TOUGH WAS STOPPED AT THE GATE BY THE DIMINUTIVE FIGURE OF A SERGEANT AIR-GUNNER...



AS THE SERGEANT EXPLAINED, A RECOLLECTION GLIMMERED IN THE BACK OF TOUGH'S MIND...

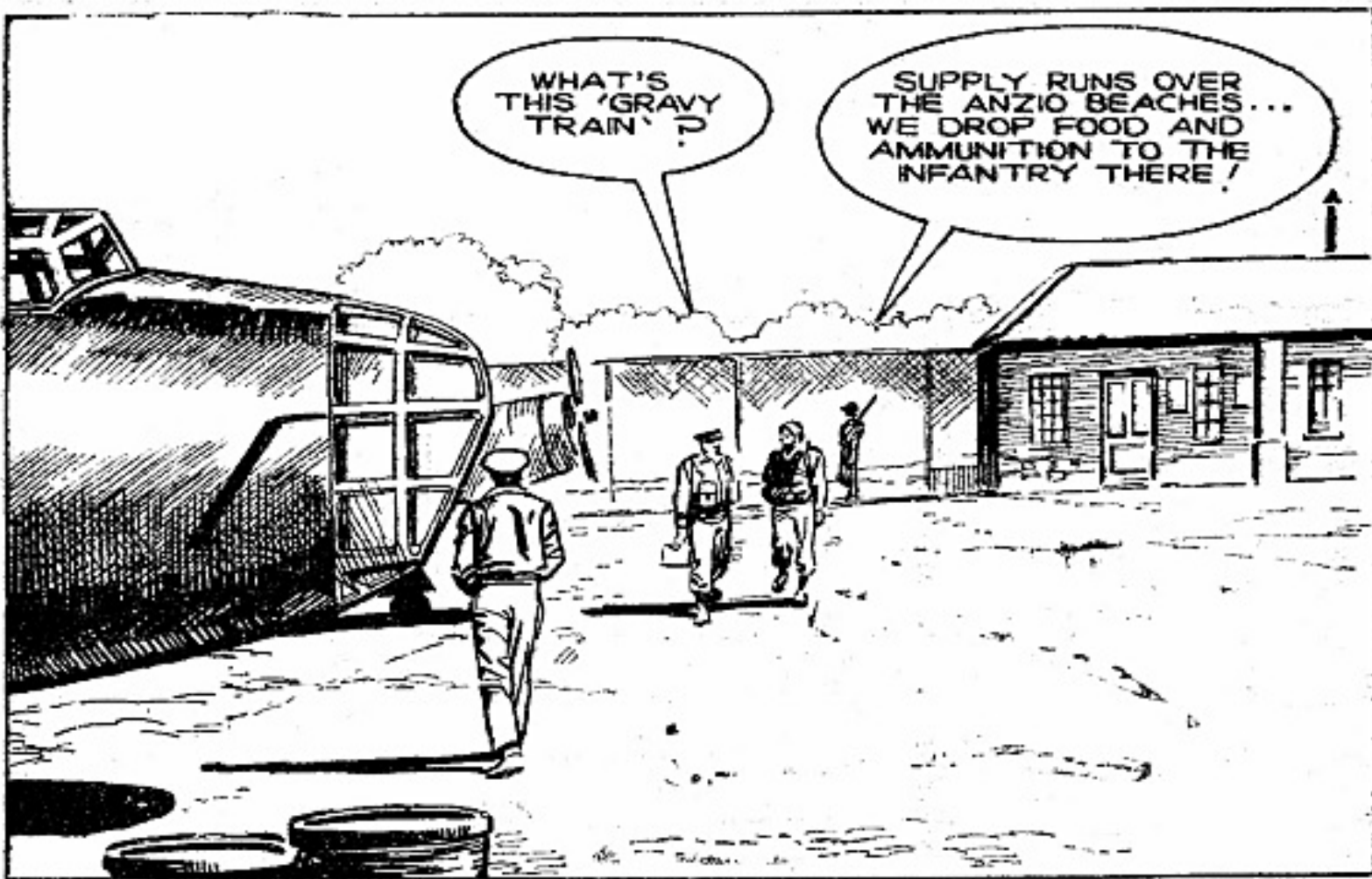
I WAS AN INFANTRY CORPORAL BEFORE TRANSFERRING TO THE AIR FORCE, SIR! BEEN THROUGH YOUR SCHOOL AT WINTLESHAM -- I'M SORRY TO SAY!



...HE *DID* REMEMBER THIS MAN... THE BIGGEST BUNGLER THAT HAD EVER PASSED THROUGH HIS HANDS!

... YOU'RE THE MAN WITH A GENIUS FOR DOING THINGS WRONG!

YES, SIR... BUT I'VE DONE A LOT BETTER SINCE I'VE BEEN FLYING. I'LL BE GLAD TO FINISH WITH THIS GRAVY TRAIN RUN AND GET BACK TO REAL OPERATIONS.



AT THE MENTION OF ANZIO, THE RUGGED FEATURES OF OLD TOUGH'S FACE FLICKERED WITH INTEREST. THE SERGEANT'S CURIOSITY WAS AROUSED AND TOUGH POURED OUT HIS STORY.

SO YOU WANT TO GET TO THE BEACHES, DO YOU? WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO FIX IT-- IF YOU DON'T MIND TAKING A CHANCE!

I'D BE MOST OBLIGED FOR ANY HELP YOU CAN GIVE, SERGEANT!

NEXT DAY, THE DAKOTA THAT NOSED THE AIR TOWARDS THE ANZIO BEACH-HEAD CARRIED A HIGHLY UNOFFICIAL ADDITION TO ITS CARGO ...

NAVIGATOR TO PILOT... DROPPING ZONE COMING UP!

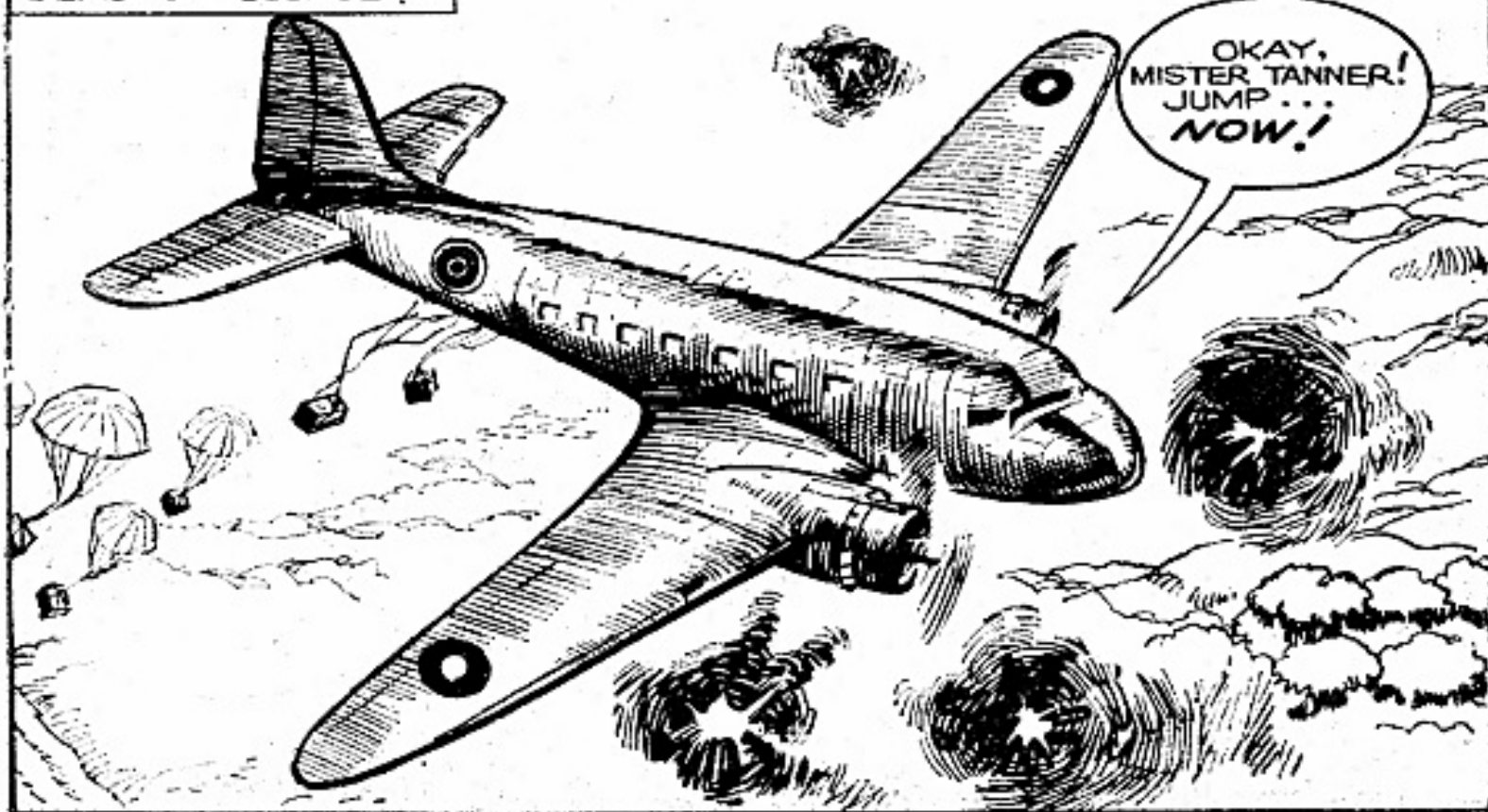
IN THE FUSELAGE OF THE AIRCRAFT SAT TOUGH TANNER, APPREHENSIVELY WAITING TO MAKE THE FIRST PARACHUTE JUMP OF HIS LIFE...

WHAT DID THAT PILOT CHAP SAY? JUST STEP OUT WHEN HE GIVES THE WORD... THE REST IS AUTOMATIC. SOUNDS A LITTLE TOO EASY TO ME!



FLAPS DOWN, THE DAKOTA SAILED LOW OVER THE DROPPING ZONE ~ ANZIO BEACH-HEAD! BURSTS OF FLAK FROM THE GERMAN GUN-POSTS ROCKED HER VIOLENTLY, BUT THE STEEL-NERVED PILOT KEPT HER DEAD ON COURSE!

OKAY, MISTER TANNER! JUMP... NOW!



A LITTLE SHAKILY, TOUGH FORCED HIMSELF OUT OF THE DOOR... TO HAVE THE BREATH TORN FROM HIS MOUTH BY A FIERCE BLAST OF SLIP-STREAM WHICH SENT HIM TUMBLING OUT IN A MOST UNDIGNIFIED POSTURE!




AS HE DRIFTED EARTHWARDS UNDER THE PARACHUTE, A HAIL OF GERMAN BULLETS HISSED PAST HIM. TOUGH TANNER SHOOK HIS FIST IN FURY...



WAIT TILL
I GET DOWN
THERE, YOU
SQUARE-
HEADS!

WITH A BUMP THAT RATTLED THE TEETH IN HIS HEAD, TOUGH HIT THE DECK AND ROLLED OVER... AT LONG LAST HE HAD REACHED HIS DESTINATION ~~ ANZIO BEACH-HEAD!



THAT BLOKE
MUST NEED HIS
BRAINS TESTED...
MAKING A
PARACHUTE JUMP
INTO *THIS*
PLACE!

HURRIEDLY, TOUGH SHED THE PARACHUTE HARNESS. HE DIVED FOR THE NEAREST FOX-HOLE, AS A BURST FROM A GERMAN MACHINE-GUN SAVAGED THE GROUND BESIDE HIM...



HE LOOKS
A BIT OLD FOR
A PARATROOPER,
DON'T HE?

AM I ANYWHERE
NEAR THE FOURTH
PETTSHIRES?

THE SOLDIERS IN THE FOX-HOLE HAD NOT YET RECOVERED FROM THEIR SURPRISE AT SEEING A LONE PARATROOPER FLOAT INTO THEIR MIDST...

THIS ^{IS} THE FOURTH PETTSHIRES, SIR! WHO DO YOU WANT-- THE C.O.?

NO--I'M LOOKING FOR SERGEANT TANNER.

SUDDENLY THE TRUTH BURST UPON CHALKY WHITE!

DON'T TELL ME THAT YOU'RE HIS FATHER-- TOUGH -- I MEAN, MISTER TANNER FROM THE BATTLE SCHOOL, SIR?

THAT'S RIGHT! WHERE CAN I FIND MY SON?

HE'S IN ONE OF THE FOX-HOLES ROUND HERE, SIR! BUT IF I WERE YOU, I'D WAIT FOR THINGS TO QUIETEN DOWN A BIT BEFORE TRYING TO FIND HIM...

GOOD GRIEF, MAN, THIS IS NOTHING COMPARED TO THE BARRAGES WE WENT THROUGH IN THE FIRST WAR!

DISREGARDING CHALKY'S ADVICE, TOUGH SET OFF, CRAWLING ACROSS THE BROKEN TERRAIN TO FIND HIS SON, JACK ...

SERGEANT
TANNER!
SERGEANT
TANNER!



TOUGH'S FOG-HORN VOICE PENETRATED ABOVE THE CRACKLE OF SMALL-ARMS FIRE AND THE BOOMING OF MORTARS ... AND FINALLY CARRIED TO JACK TANNER'S EARS ...

DAD!

HALLO, SON...
BE WITH YOU IN
A MINUTE!



IMPATIENT TO SEE HIS SON, FOR ONCE TOUGH TANNER FORGOT TO FOLLOW HIS OWN ADVICE. HE TOOK A NEEDLESS RISK AND RAN FULL Pelt TOWARDS HIM, IGNORING THE STORM OF HOT METAL SINGING ROUND HIS EARS...



DESPITE THE CLATTER OF THE BATTLE RAGING AROUND THEM, FATHER AND SON GREETED EACH OTHER EXCITEDLY. BUT AS ANOTHER BURST OF SPANDAU BULLETS SLICED ABOVE THEIR HEADS, JACK EXPLAINED THAT THERE WOULD BE LITTLE CHANCE OF A CELEBRATION...

WE WON'T HAVE MUCH OF A PARTY, DAD. THE JERRIES HAVE GOT A CONCRETE MACHINE-GUN EMPLACEMENT STRAIGHT AHEAD-- AND IT'S DEAD ACCURATE!

IT'S NEARLY THIRTY YEARS SINCE I WENT ON A RAIDING PARTY, SON. LET'S FIX THAT JERRY POSITION TONIGHT AS A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION.



SOON AFTER DARK, TWO STEALTHY FIGURES SLIPPED OVER THE RIM OF THE FOX-HOLE, CARRYING BUNDLES OF FUSED EXPLOSIVE. THEY SET OFF UP THE HILL FOR THE ENEMY MACHINE-GUN POST!



THERE WAS AN UNCANNY STILLNESS IN THE AIR AS THEY CRAWLED CLOSER IN THE DIRECTION OF THE ENEMY LINES ... THE OLD WARRIOR WELL TO THE FORE!



SUDDENLY, TOUGH TANNER REALISED, TO HIS GREAT MORTIFICATION, THAT HE HAD LOST HIS SENSE OF DIRECTION IN THE DARKNESS ... HE NO LONGER KNEW WHERE THE MACHINE-GUN POST WAS!

WHY
HAVE YOU
STOPPED, DAD?
SOMETHING
UP?

I...ER...THOUGHT
I HEARD A NOISE
JUST AHEAD! DON'T
EVEN WHISPER, SON,
UNLESS IT'S
VITAL!



AT THAT MOMENT, A FLARE FLAMED IN THE BLACK VAULT OF THE NIGHT, AND THE GERMAN MACHINE-GUN HAMMERED OUT A STREAM OF BULLETS. CRAFTILY, TOUGH WATCHED FOR THE GUN'S MUZZLE-FLASH...



GUIDED BY THE SEARING STABS OF FLAME, THEY SOON WORKED THEIR WAY CLOSE TO THE CONCRETE EMPLACEMENT...



WHILE THE OLD VETERAN STRAINED HIS EYES FOR SIGNS OF MOVEMENT, JACK EDGED HIS WAY RIGHT UP TO THE SLIT IN THE PILL-BOX, THE EXPLOSIVE IN HIS HAND...



AS THE NAZI GUN STAMMERED INTO SILENCE, JACK THREW HIS CHARGE STRAIGHT THROUGH THE WEAPON SLIT...



JACK RAN LIKE A HARE DOWN THE SLOPE AND WAITED WITH HIS FATHER FOR THE TEN-SECOND FUSE TO SEND THE PILL-BOX SKY-HIGH.



THE LONG SECONDS TICKED BY...
NOTHING HAPPENED... AND STILL THE
GUNS KEPT UP THEIR MALEVOLENT CHATTER.



AS TOUGH CREPT FORWARD, JACK SPOTTED SOME SHADY FIGURES BEHIND THE PILL-BOX! THE GERMANS WERE COMING OUT TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING ON!



JACK'S RIFLE BARKED TWICE. THE SUSPICIOUS GERMANS FELL, AND R.S.M. TANNER SHED HIS YEARS AND RAN LIKE AN OLYMPIC SPRINTER TO THE MENACING SLIT IN THE CONCRETE!



WITHOUT PAUSING, TOUGH TANNER HURLED THE EXPLOSIVE THROUGH THE NARROW MAW IN THE SOLID CONCRETE ...



TOUGH HARDLY HAD TIME TO GET DOWN THE SLOPE BEFORE THE BLACKNESS OF THE NIGHT WAS RENT BY A RED-CORED FLAME. THE GERMAN PILL-BOX CRUMBLLED IN A SEA OF FLAME ...



THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PILL-BOX HAD MADE THE GERMANS NERVOUS. FLARES FILLED THE SKY AND THE NIGHT BECAME A FURY OF SINGING STEEL ...

WE'VE DEFINITELY
WARMED THEM UP,
SON!

THEY MUST
BE WONDERING
WHAT'S HIT 'EM!
WE KNOCKED
OUT ANOTHER
MACHINE-GUN
POST LAST
WEEK!

AS THEY NEARED THE BRITISH LINES THE OLD WARRIOR, STILL THE PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER, QUIZZED HIS SON ABOUT THE ACTION OF THE PREVIOUS WEEK ...

WAS IT A NICE
NEAT JOB LIKE
TONIGHT'S --OR DID
YOU HAVE ANY
CASUALTIES?

WE LOST ONE
OR TWO MEN.
BUT IT WAS A
DAYLIGHT JOB...
QUITE TRICKY,
DAD.

SAFELY BACK IN THE SECURITY OF THEIR OWN LINES, FATHER AND SON HELD THE LONG-AWAITED BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION ... BEER AND BULLY-BEEF UNDER FIRE!

MANY HAPPY RETURNS OF THE DAY, JACK!

LET'S HOPE WE'LL BE HOME FOR MY NEXT BIRTHDAY, DAD.



BUT THERE WAS NO TIME FOR A LONG CELEBRATION. DOWN AT THE WATER'S EDGE THE NAVY WAS LANDING REINFORCEMENTS. BIRTHDAY OR NOT, THE BATTLE WENT ON...

SUNBATHE ON THE SANDS OF SUNNY ITALY! THAT'S WHAT THE POSTERS SAY! COR... I ASK YOU!



BACK INLAND, THE WIDE MUZZLES OF THE GERMAN ARTILLERY SPAT STEEL AT EVERYTHING THAT MOVED ON THE WATER...



SO IT WAS TIME FOR THE VETERAN R.S.M. TO RETURN TO HIS DUTY AT THE BATTLE SCHOOL IN ENGLAND. SAYING FAREWELL TO HIS SON, HE MADE HIS WAY DOWN TO THE BOATS AMID A CURTAIN OF SHELL-SPLINTERS ...

CHEERIO,
DAD. SEE
YOU IN
ENGLAND!



AS A LANDING CRAFT DREW AWAY FROM THE SHORE TEN MINUTES LATER, R.S.M. TOUGH TANNER STOOD ON BOARD, GAZING AT THE BATTLE WHICH STILL RAGED ON THE BEACHES OF ANZIO ...



COTTONWOOL
COMMANDOS I CALLED
'EM — BUT THEY'RE
AS GOOD A BUNCH
OF FIGHTERS YOU
COULD FIND
ANYWHERE.

... THE STERN OLD WAR-HORSE WAS RECALLING ALL THE OLD FRIENDS HE HAD MET ON THIS MOST MEMORABLE LEAVE ... HE REALISED THAT FAR FROM BEING THE MOST UNPOPULAR MAN IN THE ARMY, HE HAD GAINED THE RESPECT AND FRIENDSHIP OF ALL THE PUPILS WHO HAD PASSED THROUGH HIS BATTLE SCHOOL. TOUGH TANNER FELT A SWELL OF PRIDE ...

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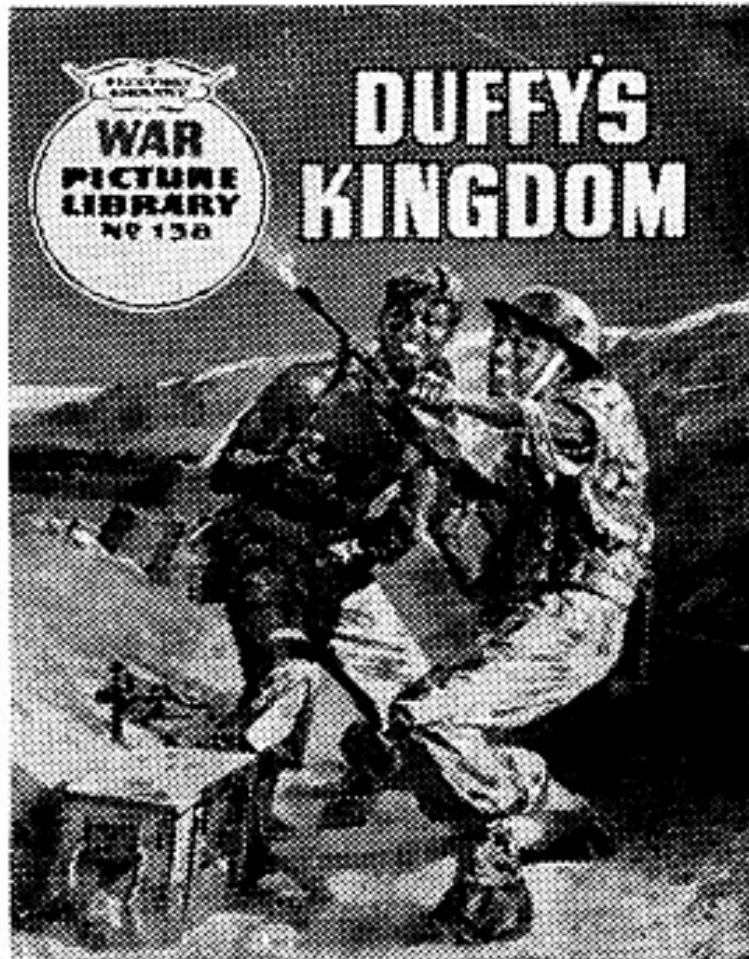
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